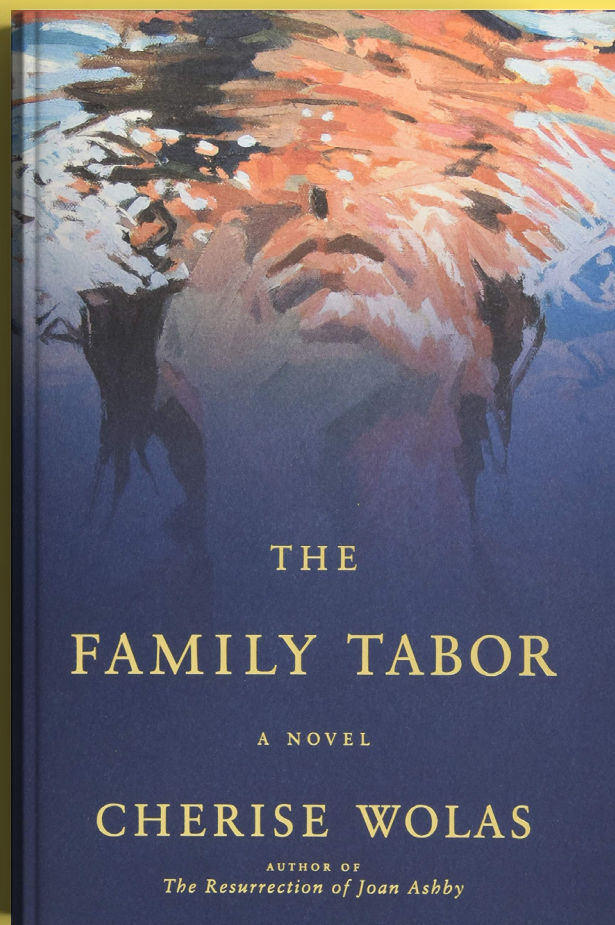


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

Created in partnership with Flatiron Books
Jewishbookcouncil.org



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A Little Background...

Repentance and the Laws of Asking Forgiveness

Through Harry's online research, he begins to learn about teshuvah, the term for what we call repentance. The word itself actually means a "returning", so returning to the path of righteousness.

There are two types of sins — those against God and those against other people.

As the famous rabbi Maimonides, the Rambam, describes in his Mishnah Torah, sins against God can be forgiven through a recognition and confession of the sin, remorse for the sin, and a promise to not repeat the sin. It is for these kinds of sins that we pray on Yom Kippur. Sins against others require the additional step of making restitution for the injured party — confession, remorse and declining to sin in the future are not enough.

The website that was discovered on Harry's laptop search—which likely informed his journey and that Simon then reads to the family on page 313—lists the laws for asking forgiveness as follows:

1. It is absolutely imperative that one receive forgiveness for sins committed against other people. Even if one is full of remorse, the day of Yom Kippur will not bring atonement for such sins unless one has appeased the hurt party and obtained his forgiveness. This includes all forms of interpersonal offences such as hurtful remarks, slander, damages, overdue debts, dishonesty in business, not respecting parents and teachers, etc.
2. Ideally, one should ask forgiveness as soon as

possible, whatever the time of year. However, people are often too busy or embarrassed to do this immediately, and the task is left until erev Yom Kippur when everyone is willing to forgive others. Rectification of any financial injustices should not be pushed off until erev Yom Kippur, since there is a positive commandment to correct such matters as soon as possible.

3. Ideally, one should ask forgiveness personally. If one cannot go to the offended party, he may call or write. However, if this is difficult, or if the person will be appeased more easily by another person, one may use a third party.
4. Ideally, the person asking forgiveness should specify the sin. However, if he thinks that doing so would upset the other person, he may ask in a general way.
5. For the offended party, it is wrong to be cruel and refuse to forgive. One of the inborn traits of the Jewish people is to be kind and forgiving. Our Sages teach that whoever forgives the faults of others, will have his sins pardoned by Hashem.
6. If the offended party refuses to forgive, one must attempt to obtain forgiveness an additional three times. Each time, three people must accompany him and different words of appeasement used. If after this the hurt party still refuses to forgive, one is not obligated to try further. One should announce in front of ten people that he has done his utmost to obtain forgiveness. If one has offended a person from whom he learned Torah, he must continue to ask

even more than three times, until he is forgiven.

7. There are situations where it is permitted to withhold forgiveness: 1. If the intention is for the benefit of the offender, to make him feel regret and prevent him from repeating the sin; 2. If the victim is afraid that he will suffer further pain if he seems to forgive easily; 3. If the victim has been slandered in public and people will not know that there has been an apology.

8. However, even in these cases, the victim must remove all feelings of hatred from his heart, otherwise his Yom Kippur prayers will not be accepted. Furthermore, it is praiseworthy to forgive even when the law does not require him to do so.

9. If the offending party cannot find the offended person, he should firmly accept upon himself to contact him after Yom Kippur to ask forgiveness.

10. If the offended person is deceased, one must go to his grave with ten people. He should say, “I have sinned against the G-d of Israel and against this person”, and should specify the sin committed. The assembled people should then say three times, “You are forgiven”. If he cannot travel to the cemetery, he should ask someone living nearby to take ten people and seek forgiveness on his behalf. If this cannot be arranged, he may gather ten people wherever he is and ask the deceased for forgiveness

This list was taken from, and was abstracted from [Maane Simcha Foundation's](#) Guidelines to the Yamim Noraim by Rabbi Yitzchok Jaeger and Rabbi Elozor Barclay (Menucha Publishers) .

For More on Repentance:

Jewish Retreats on [Four Steps of Repentance](#)

My Jewish Learning on [Repentance](#)

My Jewish Learning on [Spiraling Towards Repentance](#)

Aish HaTorah on [Teshuvah- Fixing Mistakes](#)

[4 Step Forgiveness Process For All Grievances](#)

Rabbinical Assembly on [Repentance](#)

[Maimonides' Mishneh Torah](#)

Hineni

When Harry's laptop searches reveal the Leonard Cohen song and the word “*hineni*,” Simon learns that *hineni* is a prayer that is sung on Yom Kippur, and the word is translated as “here I am” (p 306). *Hineni* is also a word that appears in the Torah.

The *hineni* prayer comes during the *musaf* service for both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It is the “cantor's prayer” because, unlike many of the other prayers where the cantor is the leader for the congregation, the *hineni* prayer is sung only by the prayer leader, as a plea for God to hear the prayers of the community and to accept the cantor as a worthy emissary of the congregation.

The idea behind both the word itself and the prayer is an offering up of oneself. It is an acknowledgement of presence that goes beyond a simple physical availability. In saying “*hineni*, here I am” there is an acceptance of vulnerability, an offering of trust, and a complete willingness to move forward. When God calls to Abraham (Genesis, Chapter 22) instructing him to take his only son up to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him, Abraham answers, “*hineni*”—Here I am. He is opening himself up to God, and whatever will be asked of him, expressing a presence of mind in addition to body and a readiness to take on the weight of what's to come.

For More on Hineni

Erica Brown, [The Hineni Moment](#)

St. Louis Jewish Light: [D'var Torah](#)

Mosaic Magazine: [The Personal Prayer at the Heart of the High Holy Days](#)

[Blog post on Hineni](#)

[Chabad on Hineni](#)

Hidden Memories

Researchers and therapists have long discussed the existence of hidden, or repressed, memories, and opinions differ on the validity and science of whether brains might hide a particularly traumatic or stressful memory. However, a recent study does suggest that if hidden memories do occur, the way to unlock them is to return to the state in which the memory was created.

The study says that there are certain memories which, as a protective mechanism, can be hidden from the conscious mind, due to extreme fright or trauma. It is believed that these memories could be state-dependent, which means that one must return to the state in which the memories were formed to access them, whether that is a mood, drug-induced state, or other trigger.

For Harry Tabor, the onslaught of memory is triggered by hearing the barking of nearby dogs, which unearths the his own thought of the dogs that the family left behind in Connecticut.

For More on Hidden Memories:

Quartz: [Study on the Secret Way Emotions Unlock Hidden Memories](#)

Northwestern University: [Retrieving Traumatic Hidden Memories](#)

Psychology Today: [Unconscious Memories Hidden in the Brain Can Be Retrieved](#)

Harvard Magazine: [Repressed Memory](#)

Psychological Science: [Scientists and Practitioners Don't See Eye to Eye on Repressed Memory](#)

The Trobriand Islands



The Trobriand Islands, where Camille lived and did her field work, are a small archipelago off the eastern coast of New Guinea, and are now part of the country of Papua New Guinea.

Despite having been “discovered,” the Trobriand Islands remain culturally intact, living according to their traditional ways and beliefs.

For More on the Trobriand Islands:

Daily Mail [article on the Trobriand Island's culture](#)

Wikipedia: [Trobriand Islands](#)

Lonely Planet's [guide to Trobriand Islands](#)

Discussion Questions from Flatiron Books

Note from Flatiron: Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *The Family Tabor*.



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *The Family Tabor*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. When Harry Tabor is being interviewed by the *Palm Times* reporter, he says: “The past no longer exists, there is only the future, whatever it may hold.” How has that sentiment shaped the course of his life? Do you agree with that point of view?
2. Why does Roma dream so frequently of her grandmother, Tatiana? What does she represent for Roma?
3. Why is Roma so affected by Noelani’s case? What does the little girl’s story reveal about Roma herself? Why do you think Noelani runs?
4. Discuss Phoebe’s views of herself. Her friends disbelieve her when she says, “Professional success isn’t the sum total of me, it’s not all that I want...” and her thoughts make it clear that she wants love and a child. Do you think Phoebe is being honest with herself?
5. Why does Phoebe invent Aaron Green? What does her invention reveal about her desires? About the pressures she feels?
7. How would you characterize this book? What genre would you ascribe it?
6. Why does Camille have such a deep interest in researching tribes in exotic locales? How does she compare and contrast her time in the Trobriand Islands with “real life”?
7. Why does Camille hide her depression from her family? Why does she feel she might have to end her relationship with Valentine Osin?
8. Why has Simon been suffering from insomnia, and

- what does it reveal about him? About his relationship with Elena? About what he might be seeking in his life?
9. Discuss the dynamics between Camille, Phoebe, and Simon. What draws them together and holds them apart? How do their bonds shift over the course of the novel?
10. Discuss the dynamics between Simon and Elena. What drew them together in the beginning and what might be drawing them apart now? Does it only have to do with Simon’s potential interest in exploring his faith?
11. Roma defines family as “a shambling creature made from accidental love, a meshing of beliefs occasionally disarrayed by inevitable bafflement, and the creation of others adorned with names signaling hope for their natures, prospects for their futures. Whether there is love, happiness, contentment, success, health, and satisfaction, or sadness, trauma, and tragedy in any family, so much is dependent on ephemeral luck.” Do you agree with her formulation? How would you define family?
12. Harry thinks he’s been a very lucky man. When Roma wakes, she first thinks about luck. Phoebe thinks her luck in love has run out. Camille thinks her luck is broken. Simon thought he was the luckiest boy when his father knew everything about San Jacinto. What role does luck play in each of the Tabors’ lives? What role does the concept of luck play in the novel? What role does luck play in your own life?

13. Harry begins to hear a “voice” while he’s playing tennis with Levitt. Who do you think the voice belongs to?

14. The “voice” tells Harry: “When you began life anew in the desert, the future became everything, the only thing, and since then you have believed you have always lived an endless sequence of perfect days.” Neurology has proven that a person can completely eliminate memories, and such elimination alters the brain. Why has Harry eliminated the dark memories from his past in New York? Have you ever been shocked by the reappearance of a memory you’d long forgotten?

15. The Tabors are extremely close, yet each of them keeps secrets from the others. How well do you think we can ever know the people in our lives, even our family members?

16. Roma asks Simon: “Who among us is ever as good as they can be, as they want to be? And isn’t the effort what’s most important, the pursuit in that direction, that the good we discover in ourselves we claim, or reclaim, and use wisely and well, and spread it around, and pass it on?” What do you think? How do each of the Tabors make an effort to be as good as they can be, and what holds them back? Do you think subsequent good acts can ameliorate or wipe out earlier bad acts?

17. When Simon realizes his marriage to Elena is over, he reflects: “love, no matter how real, no matter the passion that birthed it, is not always enough.” What exactly does he mean? Do you agree?

18. What does Harry mean that he is a “historical Jew”? Discuss the role of Judaism in the novel. How are the different characters shaped by it? The Tabors are a modern Jewish family. Does the fact that they are Jewish make them different from other families of different religious faiths? What do you see as similarities and differences?

19. The novel ends with Simon visiting Max Stern’s house in Jerusalem. What is the significance of that meeting? What do you think the future holds for

Simon?

20. Which member of the Tabor family did you most relate to? Why?

JBC Book Clubs Discussion Questions

These questions were created by JBC Book Clubs as a supplement to the Flatiron Books reading group guide above. They may also contain spoilers.

1. Building on the question about luck above, what is luck? Who has it? Can it be changed? Is it a gift or something that people create for themselves?
2. Do mitzvahs outweigh sins? If a sin leads to a good deed, do the ends justify the means? Discuss Owen Kaufmann's final question, "But when so few help others, can we afford to condemn those who do?" (p. 377).
3. What is the importance of CST to Harry? Why would he choose it for his bank code? And again the name of his agency?
4. Why do you think Harry listens to the Leonard Cohen song? What is it's meaning to him?
5. The word Hineni first appears in the Torah when God calls to Abraham to ask him to sacrifice his son. In what way does The Family Tabor echo the story of the Binding of Isaac? In what ways are each member of the family saying "Hineni"?
6. Why does Harry begin to hear the voice when he does?
7. What do you think Lucy's verbal tic indicates? What changes for her?
8. Harry and Simon both make intensely personal decisions that answer a definite and defining need — Harry to seek out Max Stern and Simon to explore Judaism. These conclusions are ones that each feel they have no choice but to make. But they are also unilateral decisions that will affect those around them. Are they right to make these choices for themselves? Are they choices or imperatives (p. 331)? Do you think the family members are fair in their responses?
9. What role does prayer play in the novel? There is an old joke that is told across many different religions in which someone who is searching for something—say, a parking space maybe—prays to God to find one, and then, all of a sudden, one opens up, and the person says to God, "Nevermind, I found one." How does this joke relate to the story? On page 133, the voice says to Harry, "You never once gave credence to the idea that your words had been heard...that every action you had taken since that stormy afternoon was because your prayers had been answered." What would have been different for Harry if he had accepted the notion of an answered prayer?
10. In that same paragraph (p. 133), the voice says to Harry, "Instead, you were certain that what was seeing you through...had only to do with your inherent and inherited will to survive." Do you think there is an inherited will to survive?
11. Discuss the ending of the novel. Do you think there could have been any alternate ending? Was the conclusion, whether it was what you wanted or not, satisfactory?

Recipe:

Arnold Palmers

Arnold Palmers, named for the famous golfer who invented them, actually originated in Palm Springs. It is Roma's favorite drink, and pitchers of Arnold Palmers are served throughout the novel.

Ingredients

Iced tea

Lemonade

Ice

Lemon wedge for serving

1. Combine iced tea and lemonade at a 3:1 ratio, and pour over ice.
2. Sweeten as desired, if necessary



For more on Arnold Palmers:

[How to Make an Arnold Palmer](#)

[How Arnold Palmer Invented the Arnold Palmer](#)

Photo credit: Irina Slutsky/Wikimedia Commons

Recipe:

Manischewitz Red Wine Slushies

Recipe courtesy of Amy Kritzer, from her [What Jew Wanna Eat blog](#).

Ingredients

1 bottle of Concord Grape or Blackberry Manischewitz wine (750 ml)

2 cups frozen mixed berries

1/2 cup of basil leaves, plus more for garnish

1. Place the wine and berries in a blender or large food processor and blend until smooth. Then add basil leaves and blend one more time until smooth. Strain through a large strainer into a wide, shallow freezable container.

2. Freeze for at least one hour, and then break apart with a spoon. Serve in wine glasses with fruit garnishes and more basil!

Phoebe, Camille, and Simon are horrified to learn that Roma's secret ingredient in their favorite childhood popsicles was a little Manischewitz (p. 154). This recipe is a more adult version.



Photo credit: Chris Waits/[Flickr Commons](#)

Recipe: Palm Springs Date Shakes and Monkey Flips

Yield: Makes 2 quite large (pint-sized) shakes or 4 (as shown) 8-ounce shakes.

Ingredients

1 cup boiling water (optional, for the smoother shake method)

1 cup pitted dates (about 120 grams), roughly chopped

A few gratings of fresh nutmeg

2/3 cup milk

2 cups (410 grams) vanilla ice cream

Whipped cream and maraschino cherry, to serve

These recipes originally appeared on Deb Perelman's blog SmittenKitchen.com. Deb is a self-taught home cook, photographer and the creator of smittenkitchen.com. She is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling cookbooks *The Smitten Kitchen Cookbook* and *Smitten Kitchen Every Day*.

The original post with Deb's notes, tips, and explanations can be found [here](#).

Date shakes (and monkey flips) are iconic symbols of Palm Springs, so celebrate the city of the Tabors with these sweet treats.

1. If you'd like the smoothest date shake: Pour boiling water over dates in a medium bowl, cover with a lid and let steep for 10 to 15 minutes (longer if you have time). Blend both water and dates in blender until smooth — it will seem like too much water at first but will eventually become a thickish puree. Transfer to freezer for a few minutes to cool it, if it's not cold enough already. Add date puree back to blender bowl, if they're not there already. Or if you don't mind some nubby bits of dates in your shake: Blend dates with a splash or two of the milk until they're finely ground.

2. Both methods: Add nutmeg, milk and ice cream and blend until smooth. Pour into glasses, top with whipped cream and a cherry.

To Make a Monkey Flip

Use all the ingredients above, plus 1/4 cup smooth peanut butter, 1/4 cup chocolate syrup and 2 medium bananas and blend until smooth. You'll end up with 5 small (8-ounce) shakes instead of 4, but that last one can be your little secret.

The Family Tabor Playlist

Click on the song titles to hear each song.

Chet Faker, “I’m Into You”

Phoebe listens to Chet Faker on the way down to Palm Springs (p. 77)

Leonard Cohen, “You Want It Darker”

This is the Leonard Cohen song that Harry plays, with the Hineni chorus

Leonard Cohen, “Hallelujah”

Roma listens to Cohen’s Hallelujah album while waiting on news of Harry (p. 358)

Lev Tahor, “Deaf Man in the Shtiebel”

The story in this song is reminiscent of that of the deaf cantor, Simon Tabornikov.

Dixie Chicks, “Goodbye, Earl”

This song brings to mind the story of Baba Tatiana and Inessa

Q & A with Author Cherise Wolas

JBC: Every story has a story, so what's the story behind *The Family Tabor*? What was the spark that started this narrative for you?

Cherise Wolas: I first imagined the fictional Tabors during a snowstorm when I was living in a tiny town in Washington State. In their first iteration, they could speak the mostly-dead language of Aramaic, and the youngest child was a hemophiliac who dreamt himself living the fantastical lives of other boys.

In their second iteration, the Tabors were parsing through their quasi-magical components and clarifying into a contemporary family.

In their third iteration, they appear in *The Resurrection of Joan Ashby*, my debut novel, and are the subjects of one of Joan Ashby's acclaimed story collections. Both versions of the family appear in Joan's excerpted stories—the quasi-magical and the contemporary.

Despite tucking the Tabors into Joan Ashby, they stayed larger-than-life in my mind. And they began altering, expanding, wrestling with concepts of luck, memory, truth, family happiness, the psychology of relationships, self-created narratives, and the Gordian knots that tie a family together. They were also resettling themselves in Palm Springs, California.

And thus their fourth iteration is *The Family Tabor*.

Patriarch Harry, matriarch Roma, and their adult children, Phoebe, Camille, and Simon, emerged as a family that is brilliant, accomplished, and worldly. They glow. They are lucky. They seem free of lurking

dark truths. They are very modern. They are also Jewish.

In every previous iteration, their being Jewish was simply a fact about them. Although they can't help but be steeped in the ancient history of the Jews and in the history of their own relatives, it did not define them at all. And because it did not define them, I never expected faith, religion, and religious identity to become themes in the novel, but each family member had a specific response, or lack thereof, to the faith of their ancestors, and those responses insisted on being explored.

Roma, an esteemed child psychologist, treasures the mind over faith. Phoebe, an entertainment lawyer, lights the Friday night candles when she remembers. Camille believes in none of it; her religion is her social anthropological work, studying tribes out in the field. Simon has never seriously considered it, although he litigates the repatriation of stolen relics, including art stolen from the Jews by the Nazis; he and his Catholic wife, Elena, have kept religion out of their home and marriage. And Harry considers himself a "historical Jew," aligned with the cultural and ethical lineage of his people, but he absolutely does not believe in the power of prayer. When I realized Harry had seriously prayed one time earlier in his life, when he was frightened by incongruous actions he had taken, Harry's conflict, and the life he builds afterwards for himself and his family, became inextricably linked to the past and the future, and to notions about faith in general and Judaism in particular.

The Tabors' narrative is that of a happy family. For Harry and Roma, who are still in love after more than forty years of marriage, their foundational happiness is rooted in what they have created together—meaningful and productive lives, pride in their children, and grandchildren.

For Phoebe, Camille, and Simon, their foundational happiness is rooted in the family's origin story, which they have had no reason to doubt. But despite the golden familial glow, each is privately struggling—Phoebe can't find love; Camille can't figure out why her life has jumped off track; and Simon feels a hole in his soul.

The Family Tabor unfolds over one summer weekend when Harry is to be named Man of the Decade for his three decades of good works resettling refugees in what he calls his desert. The family is gathering for the momentous occasion and the enormous gala in his honor.

Roma is the family's conduit to the past, but Harry has long rejected the past. For him, there is only the future. As his children make their way home to Palm Springs, each grappling with personal troubles, Harry is playing his usual Saturday morning tennis game with a pal, delighted with his world that he believes he created out of whole cloth, about the evening's gala in his honor, and about all the brightness in his future. And then, on that tennis court, his past roars into his present. He sees visions, hears a voice, and is forced to uncover a long-buried memory that shocks, then shatters him, and unravels his life and his world.

Does the past remain in the past or does it spill into the present without our being aware? How do the choices we make to embrace or abandon a love, a marriage, a dream, a faith, a bad act, a lost memory, the secrets and failures of ourselves and others shape us? Why do we hide what goes on in our own hearts and minds from our families? Do we ever know those we are closest to?

What is the nature of luck? Of repentance, of atonement? Can harm caused to a specific person be absolved by doing good deeds for many others? Can

the doing of good whitewash the bad that preceded it?

These are the questions the characters raised with me early in their fourth iteration. And these are the questions that come to assail the Tabor family during what they all expected would be a glorious summer weekend of celebration.

Is there any history behind Harry's ancestor, Cantor Simon Tabornikov, the deaf cantor?

CW: Cantor Simon Tabornikov is completely fictional. He appeared in the second iteration of the Tabors, arriving deaf and carrying his history with him. He was born and raised in the Pale of Settlement, and graduated from the local cheder and makeshift yeshiva. When he completed his schooling, he applied to become the cantor at the one shul in his shtetl. Potential cantors were required to possess deep knowledge of the prayers, an artistic musical delivery, a pleasing appearance, a flowing beard, and a wife. These rules were as non-negotiable as the Russian Empire's rules for Jews that created desperation and deprivation—where and when and how Jews could move outside the Pale, what they could study, what professions they might enter, how much money they might earn. When the shul's rabbi hears young Simon Tabornikov sing, he takes an unorthodox stance—so what if the young man is barely bearded, a beard could always grow, and though he is unmarried, a marriageable woman surely could be located, but never to be found again is the extraordinary anomaly before him, a young cantor who possesses perfect pitch and impeccable delivery, despite being profoundly deaf.

From the start, both the deaf cantor and the youngest Tabor child were named Simon. From Tabornikov to Tabor—the perceived distance the family has traveled. Only later, when I looked up the meaning of the name, did I discover the irony that Simon means one who has heard. And I was fascinated that I had written exactly in that direction. And actually toward Shema

Cantor Simon Tabornikov, deeply connected to his faith, is able to hear his faith despite his deafness. Generations later, Simon Tabor discovers a new way to hear, and his desire to explore that new hearing alters his relationship to Judaism, to himself, his wife, and his daughters. He wants this new hearing threaded into his life and into the future of his family. “He thinks of teaching himself and his daughters what it means to be Tabors, Jews in this day and age when the hate is again growing loud and vicious. They are the most recent descendants of the original Tabornikovs who stood as one with their people, perishing because of what they were, or surviving only because of luck, and he wants his small tribe to anchor their feet in the sand along the continuum of the millennia of history to which they belong.”

As a child, sitting in synagogue during the High Holidays, the idea of the Book of Life thrilled and frightened me, how it opens on Rosh Hashanah and slams shut at the end of Yom Kippur. I would listen carefully as the rabbi read the names of those who had died between the two holidays, between the opening and closing of the book, and wonder what had happened to those people, what their last days were like, how they died. That childhood thrill and fright ended up sewn into the story of Cantor Simon Tabornikov.

We find out a little of what becomes of Simon — do you think the other Tabor children found what they were looking for in the end?

CW: Through the novel, Phoebe and Camille seem to be finding or reclaiming parts of themselves that perhaps have gotten lost, or were unclear, and both regain some of their inner fortitude and clarity. Each seems to be heading in a particular direction that might be right for them. But they, along with Simon and Roma, will have to grapple with and adjust to a massive shift in their collective foundation and family narrative. If they’d grown up knowing the truth about their father, all three Tabor children might have been different versions of themselves. But how different, and in what ways, is impossible to know. The weft and warp of every family changes over time,

and even if what is shifting happened a long time ago, for them it is occurring in the present, and their father’s secret will need to be examined and parsed. The conclusions all the Tabor children reach will create new interior analyses, and a new family dynamic, and every new dynamic in some way alters character, personality, behavior, and decision-making.

Will the Tabor daughters stay these new courses they are uncovering for themselves? Will their journeys prove fruitful and lead them to what they’re seeking? Will Simon continue down the path he’s traveling? I think readers will reach different conclusions based on their own histories and personal searches for what is universal to all of us—the desire for love, connection, the need to understand who and what we are, to find our truest selves, to believe we’re living our right lives.

Without giving too much away, did you know the end of the book when you started writing, or did that develop as the story progressed?

CW: The deeper I am in the writing, the less I seem to know. Certainly, many trajectories became clear to me as the novel moved forward, but I leave everything open so that the ending arises organically. In *The Family Tabor*, when the ending revealed itself, I fought against it, and then certain elements clicked into place, and I realized, yes, of course, it has to be this way. As both a writer and a reader, I love endings that keep me engaged with the characters, thinking and wondering what happens to them after the final sentence and the last word. There are so many ways the lives of the Tabors might go after the last page. And I keep thinking about each of them, where they are now, what they’re doing, if they’re happy, how the family has coalesced around its new circumstances. Maybe I have to write the sequel.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?
What are you currently reading and what is
the book that you recommend to everyone?**

CW: I read voraciously and a great deal from around the world. I don't have a favorite author, but there are certain authors I'll read everything they write or have read everything they wrote, including those below. It's rare for me to read a book more than once. I love complex and complicated characters, psychological acuity, and brilliance at the sentence level. I'm asked all the time for book recommendations, and this is the short-ish by-country list I've been pressing on others right now—some new, some older, some very old. Whatever I'm currently reading will soon be a book I read a while ago.

Israel:

Three Floors Up by Eshkol Nevo

The Ex and A Late Divorce by A.B. Yehoshua

Waking Lions by Ayelet Gundar-Goshen

Germany:

All For Nothing by Walter Kempowski

Go, Went, Gone by Jenny Erpenbeck

Buddenbrooks by Thomas Mann

Norway:

Shyness and Dignity and *Novel 11, book 18* by Dag Solstad

Switzerland:

Agnes, Seven Years, and *Unformed Landscape* by Peter Stamm

Iceland:

Hotel Silence by Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir

Woman at a Thousand Degrees by Hallgrímur Helgason

Turkey:

Three Daughters of Eve by Elif Shafak

Hungary:

The Door and Iza's Ballad by Magda Szabo

Britain:

The Peppered Moth and everything else by Margaret Drabble

Fraud and everything else by Anita Brookner

Crusoe's Daughter, God on the Rocks, and the *Old Filth* trilogy by Jane Gardam

Reservoir 13 and *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* by Jon McGregor

Mothering Sunday by Graham Swift

Outline, Transit, and Kudos by Rachel Cusk

In the Light of What We Know by Zia Haider Rahman

The Gustav Sonata by Rose Tremain

The Book of Evidence by John Banville

Belgium:

War and Turpentine by Stefan Hertmans

Chile:

2666 by Roberto Bolaño

Colombia:

The Sound of Things Falling, Lovers on All-Saints Day, and *Reputation* by Juan Gabriel Vasquez

Japan:

Six Four by Hideo Yokoyama

The Maids by Junichiro Tanazaki

France:

The Memoirs of Two Young Wives and *Lost Illusions* by Honoré de Balzac

The Adversary by Emmanuel Carrère

Scotland:

The Disappearance of Adèle Bedeau by Graeme Macrae Burnet

Mexico:

The Story of My Teeth by Valeria Luisella

Lebanon:

An Unnecessary Woman by Rabih Alameddine

United States:

Mary Coin by Marissa Silver

One Station Away by Olaf Olafsson

The Stone Diaries by Carol Shields

The Last of Her Kind by Sigrid Nunez

their stories to go.

Through the writing, all kinds of clues emerge. And each clue leads to a key, and each key leads to a door. And I keep going.

Tell us a little bit about your writing process and habits. When and where do you work best, do you prefer to revise as you go or write and then edit?

CW: The process always starts out mysteriously: a character pops into my mind, I hear dialogue in my head, an image appears. I start sending myself emails. I let things percolate. I research a lot of disparate topics and areas, which helps me think in different ways, and spurs other thoughts and ideas. The characters start coming into being, asking questions, and figuring out those answers is a journey taken together. In the past, when I tried outlining, I found myself instantly bored—if I already knew where the story was going, why write it? When I begin writing, I have vague and amorphous ideas, but I approach my work without any preconceived notions, and that freedom allows fascinating things to happen that I never could have anticipated, that would never have occurred, if I was writing from something predetermined. For me, writing is about exploring, and I love uncovering the mysteries and discovering the unexpected.

The people I write about are my creations, but I never think of them as characters. They are absolutely real to me, and are in my mind nearly all of my waking and sleeping hours, to which the staggering volume of emails I send myself at night attests. Writing is how I intently listen to them tell me who they are, the problems they're having, their hopes, dreams, secrets, issues, what they want to do, how they want

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